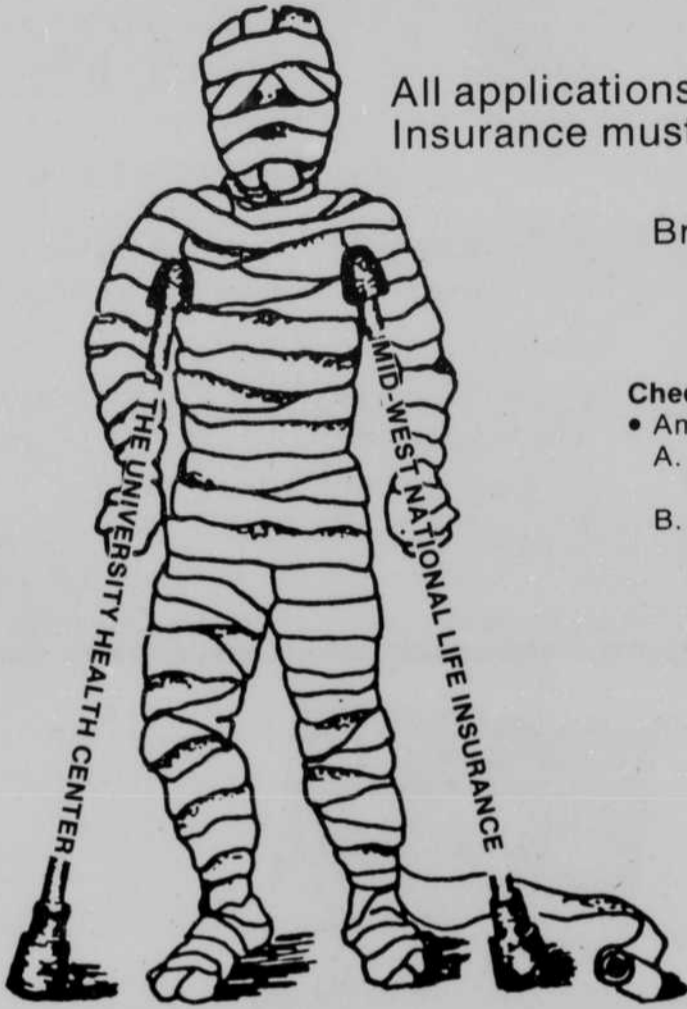


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Coach says unity, kicking key to win

By Chuck Green
Senior Editor

A unified team attitude and an improved kicking game are the two things Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne is hoping for Saturday when the Cornhuskers face UCLA.

During his weekly media luncheon Tuesday, Osborne said the Huskers need to play more consistently and concentrate on playing better opponent than they faced last Saturday. He said he thought that moving the Utah State game to the week before the UCLA game was beneficial to Nebraska.

"Hopefully, we won't make as many mistakes this week as we did last week," Osborne said. "You always hope you can iron some bugs out in the first game." Osborne said he thought the players had a difficult time getting motivated for Utah State because they didn't expect a difficult game with the Aggies.

"A lot of players were tense and you wouldn't think they would be against Utah State," he said. "Some players that hadn't started before were pretty nervous, but then you had guys who have started before, who played against Oklahoma and LSU last year, and they weren't too excited about playing Utah State."

"Hopefully, we'll have a more unified team attitude against UCLA, and that will be beneficial to us," he said.

Osborne said the team shouldn't have any problem getting motivated for this week's game because of the Bruins' high rating. UCLA was rated No. 3 behind Oklahoma and Nebraska in this week's United Press International coaches' poll.

"I believe this is the most talented (UCLA) team we'll have faced since I've been head coach here," Osborne said. "They've got great players, great coaches and it should be an outstanding ball game."

Osborne said that UCLA throws more on the average than Nebraska, but "if they have trouble moving the ball, I'm sure they'll throw a little more," he said.

"They're about like us in that they do whatever it takes to win," Osborne said.

Nebraska's kicking game, Osborne said, had both good and bad points, the bad coming in punting. He said he hopes that will improve this week.

"John Kroeker's punts weren't too spectacular against Utah State, but they will get better," Osborne said. "Yesterday (Monday) in practice, six of the seven punts he kicked during the kicking drills went about 70 yards in the air, so I know he has the ability."

Another problem Nebraska faces heading into the UCLA game is that of injuries, particularly at the tight end spot, Osborne said. Todd Millikan believes he'll be ready to play after suffering a sprained foot against Utah State, Osborne said. But second-team tight end Tom Banderas, with a knee injury is questionable, he said. If Banderas does play this Saturday, he may be only at half-speed, Osborne said.

"In terms of front-line players, that's about it," Osborne said. "Barring any difficulties in practice during the week, we'll be relatively healthy going into the UCLA game."

Sophomore I-back Terry Rodgers will be out for two to three weeks with a strained knee, Osborne said, and may redshirt this year.

Osborne said one advantage Nebraska has this week is that information on the Bruins will be more readily available.

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